

University of Groningen

## Where exactly is the European Union? Borders, regions and statistical divisions of the new EU25

Kemkers, R.H.C.

*Published in:*  
European Spatial Research and Policy

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2006

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

### *Citation for published version (APA):*

Kemkers, R. H. C. (2006). Where exactly is the European Union? Borders, regions and statistical divisions of the new EU25: Borders, regions and statistical divisions of the new EU25. *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 2.

### **Copyright**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

### **Take-down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

# **Where exactly is the European Union?**

## **Borders, regions and statistical divisions of the new EU25**

### ***1. Introduction***

The question raised in the title of this article might, at a first glance, be answered quite easily. Most readers will be familiar enough with the EU to give some descriptions, definitions or might, whether roughly or exactly, show the territory on a globe or map. However, besides mentioning the 25 member states (the so-called *EU25*), when taking a more precise look, it turns out to be more difficult locating the entity. To this is added the fact that the situation is a rather dynamical one, with changing borders over time.

Especially since May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, the area – and thus its population – of the union has been changed significantly. For general knowledge to know what we are exactly dealing with, it might be interesting for both residents of the older members, as well as for the newcomers, to take closer look at the territory, borders and regions of the EU. Especially the regions are playing an increasing role in – regional – policy. However, there is no general rule or guideline on how to establish governmental regions or what kind of characteristics they should have, since the public administration of the member states are for the EU-Commission considered to be part of the *internal affairs* of the nations. The only

part in this respect that is subject to regulation by EU-directive is the *statistical division* of the countries. In some cases, this might be a leading principle for governance as well, but it is not necessary, as will be explained in this text. Recently, on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003, the rules concerned were changed, which was of major influence on the present regional debate and the ‘regionalization’ of this intergovernmental organization. With the entry of ten new members, the largest enlargement of the union so far, the situation changed once again. Because of this, an up-to-date overview of the statistical division, consisting of over 112,000 units in the present EU, might be useful. Since the mathematical data processing, as well as the publishing normally takes considerable time, the first new official publications on this topic will be available only after a certain period. This article however offers the latest information, as well a focus on the advantages and shortcomings of the system.

Firstly, the territory<sup>1</sup> of the EU25 is defined, in order to make clear what we are dealing with. The area of the union is not always as easy definable as one might think at first; especially for people from landlocked countries it might be interesting to be confronted with parts of states that are not within or near the state borders. On the other hand there are territories in Europe in one way or another connected with member states that are not part of the union. The quite detailed section 2 discusses some peculiarities.

For the sake of an efficient regional policy, it is important to have objective and comparable figures and facts of the member states and beneficiary regions and other levels of government. Since this EU policy, by the instruments of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, is one of the most important fields of policy

and after agriculture the one with the highest transfers of money, it is for this that regulation was made in order to structure the differences between the statistical units between the countries. This resulted in the so-called NUTS-system, which divided the states in meso and local levels, mainly - and sometimes only - for statistical reasons. This structure is subject to an extensive discussion, which focuses both on the similarities and dissimilarities. The outcome of the study made, shows that despite the projected and promoted increase of comparability after a recent adjustment of the system, the differences are still considerable, making a real comparison of regions sometimes very difficult. The NUTS-system is discussed extensively, since it might increase in importance in future even more, since EU influence on national policy is still increasing and for the growing cross border co-operation (*INTERREG*) the subdivisions are the assigned units as well. After a general introduction to the system of statistical division, the individual levels are discussed. After this, section 3.3 deals specifically with the differences between the NUTS-regions, which is followed by some concluding remarks.

## **2.    *The territory of the EU25***

Since the joining of 10 mainly East- and Central-European countries in 2004, the European Union<sup>2</sup> contains 25 members. There are: Germany, France, Italy and the three Benelux countries (Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg), as being the original founders of the institution. The joined countries are Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (1973), Greece

(1981), Spain and Portugal (1986) and Austria, Sweden and Finland (1995). On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus entered, making up all together the world's largest economical union, covering 3,978,000 km<sup>2</sup>, uniting approximately 454 million people.

The EU is not a territory of just neighbouring countries, since e.g. Switzerland and Liechtenstein are in the heart of the union, bordered at all sides by it, where Greece is separated from the main area. In the enlarged EU, there is even an enclave: the Russian *oblast* of *Kaliningrad*, bordered by Lithuania and Poland.

At the same time there are differences between the 'territories' of the EU. One example is the *Eurozone*, the countries in which the *euro* replaced the national currency. This zone does not coincide with the EU15, since the UK, Sweden and Denmark did not introduce the *euro* so far. At the same time there are (small) countries as Andorra, Vatican City, San Marino and Monaco, in which the currency is valid as well<sup>3</sup> although these independent states are non-EU enclaves within the geographical entity of continental Europe. The same is the case e.g. for the *Schengen agreement*, reducing border controls between member states: not all EU15 countries did agree on this, while the small independent states and e.g. Norway did sign the treaty.

Besides, there are territories being part of the geographical territory of the member states, which do not belong to the EU. The opposite is reality as well, which makes parts of other continents subject to the jurisdiction of the union.

To begin with the first possibility, the non-EU parts, this phenomenon is particularly related to islands. In many cases these territories are highly autonomous regions, with own governments and parliaments and e.g. an own currency and stamps. For each territory in one way or another belonging to one of the member states, special protocols decided on the status and the entry to the EU or not. The situation changes from time to time as well, as e.g. with *Greenland*. As a part of the Danish Kingdom it was part of the former EEC, but in 1985 it was granted a high degree of independence and it cut loose from 'Europe' (Prakke *et al.*, 1998). This resulted in the loss of a huge area (more than 2 million km<sup>2</sup>) of the union, although the population decreased only about 50,000. The other Danish possession of the *Faeroese Islands* (*Føroyar*, 21 islands, 1399 km<sup>2</sup>, 48,000 inhabitants) between Scotland and Iceland is also not part of the EU. The same is the fact for the Dutch colonies of the *Netherlands Antilles* and *Aruba*, together six islands in the Caribbean. Only in name and for their protection and economic support they are part of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, in practise they possess a high degree of independent governance.

Perhaps a strange and commonly unknown fact is the status of some British islands and dependencies. As for over centuries, some territories of the British Crown are enjoying a special autonomy and relationship with the motherland. First of all *Gibraltar* is not part of the EU. Until the entry of Spain to the EU, "The Rock" was suffering from Spanish embargos; the present situation is a more normalized one, due to the stabilized relationship between the UK and Spain (that still holds some claims to the peninsula). The strategic port and town of 6 km<sup>2</sup> (30,000 inhabitants) is not the only area with this status, putting it outside

the union. The island of *Man* in the Irish Sea and the Channel Islands just a couple of miles off the French coast (the so-called *bailiwicks* of *Jersey*, *Guernsey* and the even smaller dependent islands of *Sark* and *Alderney*) are not direct part of the United Kingdom, but are semi-independent nations, protected by nearby Britain. The same is the fact for other British dependencies as protectorates and (former) colonies outside Europe. At the same time other British islands as the *Isle of Wight* and the *Scilly Islands* near the English coast, the Welsh island of *Anglesey*, as well as the Scottish *Hebrides* (including tiny far away *St. Kilda*), and the *Shetland* and *Orkney* Islands are part of the EU.

Actually, apart from the exceptions mentioned above in this section, all islands, islets and other areas close to the ‘mother nation’ in Europe are part of the EU, like the Italian sparsely inhabited Pelagian Islands *Linosa* and *Lampedusa*, as well as the island of *Pantellaria* between Sicily and Tunisia; the same is the case for all islands belonging to Greece. A special case is the Greek peninsula of *Athos*. This 50 kilometres long-shaped dominion in the Aegean Sea is home to 12 monasteries. For centuries entrance to this holy territory is forbidden for women. This would lead to violence of the EU policy of free passing and moving, and the Greek government foresaw this. Because of this, *Athos*, as an inseparable part of the Hellenic Republic, is part of the EU, however special protocols regulate some special rights and provisions for this area (Kemkers, 2004). Special agreements were also reached on the strategic German micro island of *Helgoland* in the North Sea. Leaving the main economical attraction for its 2,000 inhabitants, the island is declared to be tax-free, for the rest it is as much part of EU as any other German territory.

Mainly due to colonial history and different national systems of governance, some political parts of the EU are outside the geographical continent of Europe. In order to remember the European citizens of this, all these territories can be found on all the maps of the EU, including those on the euro banknotes. First of all there are the Spanish *Islas Canarias* (Canary Islands), 7 islands near the Moroccan coast, divided into two provinces, forming one Spanish Autonomous Region. Also the Portuguese Autonomous Regions in the Atlantic Ocean, *Madeira* (main island and a couple of small islets) and the *Açores* archipelago are subject to EU jurisdiction. The same case is the fact for the two small Spanish exclaves in North-Morocco: *Ceuta* and *Melilla*.

Finally there are the French *Départements d'Outre-Mer* (DOM), four overseas departments of the same status as French continental departments, meaning that they do not have any autonomy, but are directly subject to French parliamentary jurisdiction, in which they are represented as well of course. Although the total number of inhabitants is less than 1,5 million, their area is considerable. The four DOMs are: *Réunion* (2510 km<sup>2</sup>, 625,000 inh.) in the Indian Ocean, *French Guiana* (Guyane (française), 90,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 104,000 inh.), the Caribbean island of *Martinique* (1100 km<sup>2</sup>, 370,000 inh.) and Caribbean *Guadeloupe* (apart from the main island, including the French (northern) part of *Saint-Martin*<sup>4</sup>, *Marie Galante*, *La Désirade*, *Îles-les-Saints* and *Saint-Barthélemy*; total: 1710 km<sup>2</sup>, 400,000 inh.). It is amazing to see the number of civil servants each day travelling by airplane between Paris and Saint-Denis, Cayenne, Fort-de-France and Basse-Terre<sup>5</sup>. They are accompanied by EU officers of course. It



should be kept in mind that this situation does not occur at the other French overseas areas: the two *Collectivités territoriales* (Territorial Collectivities) of the island *Mayotte* in the Indian Ocean and the small islands of *Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon* just off the coast of Canadian Newfoundland are not part of the EU. They are special territories, with some individual governance but, mainly because of their size, for most cases they are governed by Paris. Also the four *Pays et Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (PTOM; Overseas Countries and Territories) do not belong to the EU. To be complete, they consist of: *Nouvelle-Calédonie* (New Caledonia; an island in the Pacific, since 1998 more autonomous as an ‘overseas country’, the other three are ‘territories’), the neighbouring island group of *Polynésie française* (French Polynesia), the two Pacific islands of *Wallis-et-Futuna* and last but not least the *TAAF* (*Terres australe et antarctique françaises*), the French islands in the Indian Ocean<sup>6</sup> and the French claim of Antarctica, all mainly uninhabited, except for some researchers.

### **3.    *The EU NUTS-structure***

#### *3.1    Background of NUTS*

As mentioned before, for a good comparison of statistical indicators of the member states, a common statistical structure was required. In the beginning *EUROSTAT*, the statistical office of the EU based in Luxembourg, mainly focussed at economical indicators. These were important for dividing the regional policy funds over the member states and their regions. Especially that last group

envisaged an increasing attention and favour of the EU, which phenomenon commonly has been referred to as the “Europe of the Regions” (Le Galès & Lequesne, 1998). National statistical offices sent their data, based on the national divisions, to EUROSTAT, where they were used for compiling EU statistics. For a better comparison and co-operation, the countries were required after a while to use certain standards. This led to 5 possible levels of statistical units (although it was not required for countries to have 5 separate levels). In 1988 the NUTS-structure was established: *Nomenclature des Unités Territoriales Statistiques* (nomenclature of territorial units for statistics). It turned out after a while that the differences in both surface and population between the member states differed significantly. At the same time member states changed their borders frequently, sometimes this was favoured by influencing – economical - statistics<sup>7</sup>. The naming of the levels of NUTS was confusing, partly due to EUROSTAT. For example, in some countries like Portugal NUTS-levels were called e.g. “NUTS II-groups”, albeit according to a – newer - structure those were the actual NUTS I-level. With the nearing entering of the 10 new member states, a total new NUTS-structure was established in May 2003 (effective since July 2003), trying to cope with the criticism of the former system (Eurostat, 2003). The directive<sup>8</sup> now includes an obligation to divide the whole territory in statistical units, whereby *each* unit should consist of a *whole* number of *all* the units at the lower level, whereby NUTS 0 is always the member state. It is not possible that one statistical unit does not belong to any higher level, or that it belongs to two higher levels at the same time.<sup>9</sup> The new regulation also comprises barriers for changing the statistical borders and levels in a member state too frequently. The most important

change is the introduction of a new, highly recommended, standard for the NUTS-levels, which is – as a compromise between the member states – based on the *average population* of the statistical units, see *Figure 1*. The former NUTS IV and NUTS V-levels for defining the *local governments* are now called LAU (Local Administrative Unit) 1 and LAU 2. There are no requirements for their sizes, since the EU regional policy mainly focuses on the NUTS 1 and 2 levels<sup>10</sup> where as for other statistics especially the NUTS 0 (= State) level is the most important.

---

*Figure 1*

---

### 3.2 *The present NUTS-structure*

#### 3.2.1 *General description*

The new NUTS-structure is after all not as revolutionary as originally favoured by many stakeholders. Actually most of the structure remained unchanged and once again this shows the internal decision power of the member states in this field. First of all it is important to keep in mind that the NUTS-structure does not tell something about the actual juridical administrative division of a state. For many countries at several levels the units are only statistical - sometimes economical planning - territories, without any jurisdiction or visible borders. Their area is influenced mainly by national preferences, influenced by historical, cultural, economical and demographical factors. Other potential characteristics, like e.g. the traditional physical geographical landscape approach<sup>11</sup> are hardly of influence. Although the EU-Directive suggests to group units on the base of the mentioned

geographical, cultural, economical, demographical, historical similarities etcetera, in practise in many cases the division seems to be quite randomly. The fact that only the *population* of a region was taken as the base for defining the separate levels results to very big differences between the NUTS-levels of the states, as well differs their population per unit (see section 3.3), since the only requirement is that the *average* of the level should fit the requirements as mentioned in *Figure 1*. The result of this focus on population only could be considered to be too one-sided and not practical for good comparisons between regions. It is highly questionable whether the new structure will be really better than the previous one.<sup>12</sup> The division of the new member states did not change the situation very much, compared to the EU15. Besides, the long discussions and heavy debates on this topic in new member states as Hungary and the Czech Republic could be considered to be remarkable, since the EU-Commission also stated that - at least in practise - old statistical structures and levels could be left unchanged if change would be difficult (for several reasons), resulting to the fact that many national statistical levels even for their average do not fit the requirements of the directive.

The present situation of the NUTS-structure in the EU25 can be found in *Figure 2*. For a good comparison, *Figure 3* shows the data for the EU-candidates Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Turkey, which are divided according to the NUTS-structure as well, and for the four countries of the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA; except for the EU25, the members are: Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland)<sup>13</sup>. The different NUTS-levels will be discussed shortly below.

### 3.2.2 *NUTS 0*

NUTS 0 consists of all the member states, undivided. As for all levels, if there are more official languages in the country accepted, then there are more names, all of them being of the same status (as e.g. België/Belgique, Suomi/Finland etcetera).

### 3.2.3 *NUTS 1*

According to the definition, the level of NUTS 1 should consist of territories having at a national level an average population between 3 and 7 million. However, since many countries do not even have a total population exceeding this number, they are for those levels considered to be undivided. For this reason, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Malta, Cyprus, Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, the three Baltic States and the UK-parts Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also NUTS 1 regions. The same counts for the four EFTA-countries, with relatively small populations. Among the new and candidate states, the larger countries Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and the Czech Republic choose this option as well. These countries have more inhabitants than the mentioned 7 million, however a division in two parts to fit the system did not seem necessary for efficiency. However, for Romania and Poland a division would have been expected, especially for the latter with a population nearly that of Spain, which is divided into 7 units at the NUTS 1-level. An explanation could be that the NUTS 1-level is used to define a country to be entitled to so-called EU *objective 1-support*, and the mentioned countries would like to be granted these subsidies for the country as a whole.

For Belgium, Germany and Portugal the division is related to governing authorities, so to say real regions, where for the other countries in most cases the NUTS 1-division consists of a – mainly - statistical grouping of some NUTS 2-units. Finland is a special case, being divided in the mainland of Finland and the autonomous region of the *Åland Islands (Ahvenanmaa)*.

---

*Figure 2*

---

---

*Figure 3*

---

#### 3.2.4 NUTS 2

For NUTS 2, probably the most important for EU regional policy and its funds, the situation is that most of the countries use the regions that are used for economical and regional planning within the countries. That coincides with the EU policy and this explains the new division in e.g. Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Poland. In some cases these regions are divisions that are used for decades. In some countries with a high population density, this level is formed by the provinces (as in Belgium and The Netherlands), although normally the counties/provinces are at the NUTS 3-level. The German *Regierungsbezirke* divide large federal states (*Länder*) into ‘provinces’,<sup>14</sup> with some authority on planning and social-cultural policy. In Austria NUTS 2 consists of the federal *Länder*, which were too small to form an own group at the NUTS 1-level, notwithstanding the fact that they are possessing strong autonomous authorities. In Italy, one region (*Trentino-Alto Adige*) has been split in the two provinces of *Trento* and *Bolzano/Bozen*, because of the cultural and language differences (Eurostat, 2003).<sup>15</sup> In Spain the division consists of the 17 Autonomous Regions plus the two Spanish town exclaves of *Ceuta* and *Melilla*. For the UK the division has been changed the last decade, forming counties, groups of counties, Inner- and Outer-London and so-called groups of unitary authorities (the local governments), which are mainly formed for statistical reasons.

### 3.2.5 NUTS 3

Generally spoken this level consists of the counties, provinces or *départements*, as mentioned before, although their names vary (*amt, län, fylke, nomos, megye, județ* etc.), mainly because of historical backgrounds. In the countries that have their – traditional - meso level of government at a higher level, the units are mainly non-governmental, like the Dutch merely statistical *COROP-regions*. In Germany, the 441 *Kreise* and *Kreisfreie Städte* make up this level. This is a co-operation of local-governments on several policies. In the UK the division is still a group of local governments, this time a larger number than at the second level. Small countries like Latvia and Slovenia have statistical regions at NUTS 3, whereas in Malta the division concerns the two most important islands.

### 3.2.6 LAU 1

The former NUTS IV-level is not present for many countries, while for other countries it mainly has a statistical background (as e.g. Hungary, Norway) or it is the division at the ‘district level’ (especially small countries like Malta, Cyprus, Iceland and Luxemburg). In a small country like Estonia these are the ‘provinces’ (*maakond*). In Greece e.g. it consists of obligated co-operation between the local settlement municipalities for many policy items. For countries like Portugal, Bulgaria, Ireland and all the parts of the UK, this level is the actual local government that is responsible for regulation and policy at the lowest level; for some small issues, they are divided into neighbourhoods or settlements (*wards, freguesias*).



### 3.2.7 LAU 2

The second Local Government Unit, the former NUTS V, consists for almost all countries of the local governments. However, their size can differ a lot between independent settlements and groups of settlements. In the countries mentioned at the previous level, the LAU 2-level refers to neighbourhoods. This level forms by far the greatest group of units: over 112,000 in the EU25, including the candidate and EFTA-countries it are more than 150,000.

### 3.3 Differences between NUTS-regions

As mentioned before, the only requirement for establishing the NUTS-units is related to their population. This resulted in a huge difference of size between the regions, especially considering their area. Despite the aim of ensuring that regions of comparable size all appear at the same NUTS-level, each of them still contain regions which differ greatly in terms of economic strength, administrative powers and even population. The dissimilarities are even increasing if we take a closer look at the differences between the *individual* regions, since the grouping was based on the *average* at the member state level. The heterogeneity is summed up in *Figures 4* and *5*, where beside the averages, also the minimum and maximum values for each country are given. Since the *LAUs* are not obligatory and there are no standards for them, those two levels are neglected in this section.

With the entry of the 10 new member states in 2004, for all levels the average increased, although the effect is for area as well as population for all of

them smaller than 10%, as is shown in both figures. It seems the accession negotiations or other related factors did have some effects on the mainly quite recently established NUTS-units in the new members, since their average normally better fits to the standards as mentioned in *Figure 1* than in the older states, and also the standard deviation (in terms of range between maximum and minimum values) is smaller.

In terms of area, the union wide average for NUTS 1 is 48,518 km<sup>2</sup>. The largest region at this level is the entire country of Sweden, with 410,934 km<sup>2</sup>. Poland comes second with 312,685, while continental Finland consists of 303,003 km<sup>2</sup>. The difference between Sweden and the smallest area, the *Capital District of Brussels* (161 km<sup>2</sup>), is about 2,500 times.

At NUTS 2, where the union's average is 15,663 km<sup>2</sup>, *Övre Norrland* (Sweden, 154,310 km<sup>2</sup>) and Finnish *Pohjois-Suomi* (133,580 km<sup>2</sup>) are the largest. These 'Nordic areas' are much larger than most of the member states. The smallest NUTS 2-unit is *Ceuta* with only 12 km<sup>2</sup>; it would fit 13,000 times in the largest NUTS 2-area!

At NUTS 3 (average 3,280 km<sup>2</sup>) we find again the Scandinavian countries: the 'arctic' provinces of *Norbottens län* (98,910 km<sup>2</sup>) and *Lappi* (93,000 km<sup>2</sup>) are approximately 8,000 times larger than *Ceuta*.

The heterogeneity for population is about the same, causing a huge standard deviation, despite the fact this was the leading principle for division. Since the small member states do not have enough inhabitants for even the NUTS 2-level,

their average is lower as well of course, even when they are not divided. But even when neglecting these are the differences considerable, e.g. *fourteen* fold at the *averages* at NUTS 1, with Poland (38,6 million) and Austria and Greece (both 2,7 million). Again apart from countries too small for division, the differences between the averages are 3.3 times (Italy-Greece) at NUTS 2, and 4.7 times (Spain-Slovenia) at NUTS 3.

At NUTS 1, with an average population of 5.537 million, we find the Republic of Poland (38,6 million), German *Nordrhein-Westfalen* with 18 million inhabitants and the Italian Regional Group *Nord-Ovest* (15 million), but also the Finish autonomous *Åland Islands* in the Gulf of Bothnia between Sweden and Finland (1527 km<sup>2</sup>, 26,000 mainly Swedish speaking inhabitants). The difference between the extremes is almost a factor 1,500!

At NUTS 2, *Île de France* and Italian *Lombardia* have a population of 11 and 9 million respectively, where apart from tiny *Åland*, 12 other units have less than 300,000 inhabitants<sup>16</sup>. According to the ‘target values’ when the new structure was established, the interval at this level was expected to be between 800,000 and 3,000,000 people. Apart from the countries with a population too small for the thresholds, except for *Denmark* and *Lithuania* the national averages of all other states do fit the limits of the directive concerned.

Finally at NUTS 3 it looks only a little bit better, with 5.151 million inhabitants for the province of *Madrid*, and over 3 million inhabitants for the regions of *Barcelona*, *Roma*, *Napoli*, *Milano*, *Berlin* and *Athens/Attika*, whereas several NUTS 3-regions like the German *Kreise* or the Belgian *Arrondissements/Arrondissementen* have a population below 50,000; the smallest

one only 20,000, an island district in Scotland. The average for the EU at this level is 374,000, which fits perfectly in the projected threshold between 150-800,000. Opposite to the other two levels, at NUTS 3 almost all 25 national divisional averages meet this standard; only the Polish figure is just too high.

---

*Figure 4*

---

*Figure 5*

#### **4. Conclusion**

As was shown in this text, the territory of the European Union and its sphere of influence are widely spread across the world, not only limited to the European continent. At the same time there are many peculiarities concerning the spatial jurisdiction of the union, making the defined area, the question ‘where exactly is it’, a more complex one than commonly thought. That is not necessarily a problem, although some extra information and attention to this phenomenon by the use of public campaigns, the Internet, or EU-leaflets among its residents might be helpful.

A fact of a different order is the statistical division of the union and its members by the NUTS-structure. Despite the signalling of the problem in previous times, long debates and a recent change, the outcome seems to be unsatisfying in many respects. Notwithstanding the frequently stressing on paying attention to the social, cultural, historic, geographical and other circumstances and characteristics, the final outcome for the change in 2003 can be considered to be a missed chance for change, creating huge differences between the individual regions. The main reason for this is the focus for dividing regions only concerning their *population*, which can be considered to be too one-sided. At the same time, as a result of compromises, the limits for population sizes are based on national *averages*, causing immense standard deviations for the individual units. Thirdly, even these limits were, of course due to many explanations, not taking into consideration in several cases.

With the entry of the ten new member states, the situation has been changed positively, but only very little. Even for these countries, which in most cases set up a totally new system of statistical division, the expected intervals were not followed, as e.g. the fact that a country like Poland is one entity at the NUTS 1-level, where countries with a comparable size are divided into 5-10 regions.

The question could be raised if this is so important. Statistics is not only about comparing, in most cases the data of the individual units are important and guiding for potential benefits from the EU. However, the policy theory of the introduced NUTS-system and the explanatory text of the directive concerned, did stress strive after creating *comparable* units, at least as far as their population is concerned. The present situation, where in terms of area the difference between *individual* units can be 13,000 times, and when comparing population the difference is sometimes a factor 1,500 can raise some questions. And even when comparing the national *averages*, in accordance with the regulation, the difference can be fourteen fold.

This article does not aim to judge upon the necessity for a further, more radical change, nor does it want to give weight to the importance of the present system; it only wants to describe facts by giving overviews and making some comparisons by simple counting. In case the text might have increased the information and knowledge of the location of the EU and its regional division, by which extra interest to other states' systems was raised, it has reached its goal.

## REFERENCES

- EUROSTAT Webpage: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat>.
- EUROSTAT (2003): *Régions – Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistique 2003*. Luxembourg: Eurostat.
- GALÈS, P. LE & C. LEQUESNE (ed.) (1998): *Regions in Europe*. London/New York: Routledge.
- HORVÁTH, T.M. (ed.) (2000): *Decentralization: Experiments and Reforms*. Local Governments in Central and Eastern Europe, vol. 1. Budapest: Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative / Open Society Institute.
- KEMKERS, R.H.C. (2004): Athos. *Girugten*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 4-5.
- PRAKKE, L., J.C.E. VAN DEN BRANDHOF & C.A.J.M. KORTMANN (ed.) (1998): *Het staatsrecht van de landen van de Europese Unie*, 5th ed. Deventer: Kluwer.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the European continent presently situated between the Nordic town of *Utsjoki* in Lapland and southern *Akrotiri*, a British base on Cyprus, and from *Dingle peninsula* in Ireland to the EU's most eastern settlement *Ayia Napa*, also on Cyprus. In case there would be doubt about the 'Europeanness' of Cyprus, the most southern point on the continent would be *Akrotirion (Cape) Lithinon* on the island of Crete, while *Ilomantsi* in Finnish Karjala (Karelia) would form the furthest point east.

<sup>2</sup> Not to mix with the *Council of Europe*, an intergovernmental organization seated in Strasbourg, mainly dealing with issues of peace, human rights and mutual European problems, of which almost all the European countries are members.

<sup>3</sup> These mini-states even have their own national euro coins, which are very popular among collectors. Besides, the *euro* is also the official currency in e.g. *Kosovo* and *Montenegro*, although these are not part of the *Eurozone*.

<sup>4</sup> The Dutch southern 2/3 part of the island Saint-Martin/Sint-Maarten is part of the *Netherlands Antilles* and thus does not belong to the EU. This division is fully desired and accepted, making it the world's smallest divided territory.

<sup>5</sup> For the good readers: to be honest, the airport of Guadeloupe is not near dull capital Basse-Terre, but in Pointe-à-Pitre.

<sup>6</sup> Among them the largest are: Kerguelles, I. Amsterdam, I. St.-Paul and I. Crozet.

<sup>7</sup> For example to create regions with an average GDP below 75% (90%) of the EU average, generally the indicators for receiving support. This puzzling with statistical areas could be seen as an economical-statistical variant on the changing of borders of electoral districts, commonly known as *gerrymandering*.

<sup>8</sup> Directive 1059/2003.

<sup>9</sup> However it is allowed that certain units are (as a whole) statistical units at two or more levels; in that case they will have a different code. The same is the case for bordering regions in different countries with the same name (as e.g. *Limburg*: there is a *Limburg* (BE) in Belgium and a *Limburg* (NL) in The Netherlands).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. sections 3 (*juncto* 13, paragraph 1) and 4 (*juncto* 13, paragraph 2) of Directive 1260/1999 on the General Regulation of the Structural Funds.

<sup>11</sup> The only case where this was of main influence was the traditional division at LAU 1 in two *Landschaften* (the Rhine valley and the Alpine part) of Liechtenstein.

<sup>12</sup> If this fact was of influence is not sure, however even the present division and especially the number of units seem to vary within one year in EUROSTAT's publications, making the statistical 'chaos' even bigger. On the other hand, considering the fact that the total number of units is over 100,000 for the EU25, the differences are small and could be neglected for most cases.

<sup>13</sup> Except for Switzerland, these three countries together with the EU make up the European Economic Area (EEA).

<sup>14</sup> Except for the *Länder* Brandenburg and Rheinland-Pfalz, where the division is non-administrative.

<sup>15</sup> Bolzano/Bozen consists of the former Austrian Süd-Tirol, and German is the most common language here; besides, a small population of *Ladentines* in this region speaks a Rhaeto-Romanic dialect.

<sup>16</sup> *Burgenland* in Austria, Ceuta, Melilla, French Guiana, Italian bilingual *Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste*, *La Rioja* (Spain), the French island *département* of *Corse* (Corsica), the Açores and Madeira, the Belgian *province* of *Luxembourg* and the Greek regions *Ionian Islands* and *Voreio Aigaio*, compounding many dozens of scattered, small islands.